

revealed the species³. Though usually considered resident, in Rwanda (Nyungwe) it was found to be apparently an intra-African migrant, with no observations in October–December (reappearing 3 January)⁶, specimens from there being taken between 30 June and 21 August¹¹. In eastern Zaïre (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) too there appear to be no published records in November–February^{8,9,12}. The species has been recorded in northern Tanzania in all months, with no obvious evidence of movements of any importance (N Baker *in litt*). One of the Rungwe specimens from 1971 was a juvenile with incomplete skull ossification, so possibly the Zambian birds represent post-breeding dispersal in the latter part of the year. On the Nyika Plateau, the migratory Amethyst Starling breeds in October³, and in Zambia as a whole some 60% of more than 100 egg-laying records are for that month³. Possible movements in some populations of Sharpe's Starling would repay investigation.

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Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*: the first record for Seychelles

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L'auteur documente la première mention pour les Seychelles du Busard pâle *Circus macrourus*, un mâle de première année observé sur l'Île Platte du 25 janvier au 30 mars 2002. La mention a été acceptée par le Comité d'Homologation Seychellois (SBRC). Auparavant, le seul busard observé aux Seychelles était le Busard des roseaux *C. aeruginosus* (deux mentions acceptées). Il y a néanmoins une observation d'une femelle adulte du Busard cendré *C. pygargus* ou Busard pâle.

On 25 January 2002, a large raptor appeared on Platte Island, at the northern end of the

runway, where it was noted by Lesley & Eric Roest, who are resident on the island. It remained on

Platte until 30 March 2002, often hunting feral chickens, which when caught were generally eaten on the runway. LR contacted AS on 18 March 2002 to report the presence of this raptor, which she considered to be a Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*. Thus, AS telephoned the Islands Development Company, managers of Platte, and arranged travel for himself and Gérard Rocamora to Platte on a supply plane scheduled for 22 March 2002, and were also able to observe the bird.

Description

A fairly large raptor with long narrow wings, slim body and long, and relatively narrow tail. Easy, light, graceful, buoyant flight. Pale orangey-buff underparts without visible streaking. Uniform dark brown upperwing and white rump. Primary 'fingers' from above darker than upperwing, being almost blackish. Underside of primaries very boldly barred black on pale grey and the pale, so-called 'boomerang' shapes, were clearly visible around the primary-coverts to almost halfway down the 'arm' when overhead. Broad creamy collar with dark blackish-brown margins. No obvious darker trailing edge to wing, the ground colour of the rear of the wing appearing mainly pale grey, only very slightly, if at all, darker near trailing edge. Axillaries unbarred. Tail barred dark and pale grey with no rusty coloration. Yellow bill. Yellow eye noted by E & LR. No call heard.

Identification

Obviously a harrier by general shape and flight, and obviously not Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, the only harrier previously recorded in Seychelles, due to several features including the white rump and orangey underparts. Montagu's Harrier *C. pygargus* was eliminated by a combination of head pattern (pale collar with dark brown lower margin) and underwing pattern (particularly the absence of a dark trailing edge and the heavily barred primaries), features that are consistent with first-winter Pallid Harrier. Eye colour indicated a male, females having a brown iris.

Status and distribution

Pallid Harrier breeds from Ukraine and south-west Russia east to Lake Balkash, north-west China and possibly northern Mongolia, wintering south mainly to sub-Saharan Africa, but also to Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka east to southern China and occasionally eastern China. It is considered Near Threatened², the world population having declined drastically to no more than 20,000 pairs in the early 1990s¹.

First accepted record

The record has been accepted by the Seychelles Bird Records Committee (SBRC) as the first record of Pallid Harrier for Seychelles. An earlier report of an adult female harrier at Bassin Cabri, Picard, Aldabra, on 4 March 2000 was accepted by SBRC as either a Montagu's Harrier or Pallid Harrier. The distribution of Montagu's Harrier overlaps substantially with Pallid Harrier and the former might be considered equally likely to appear as a vagrant in Seychelles or perhaps even more so, given that its global population is more than twice that of Pallid Harrier¹. SBRC has also accepted two records of Western Marsh Harrier.

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